

*Printed for the War Cabinet. December 1939.***SECRET.**

Copy No. 39

W.M. (39)

100th Conclusions.

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**WAR CABINET 100 (39).**

*CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Friday, December 1, 1939, at 11.30 A.M.*

**Present :**

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister ( <i>in the Chair</i> ).	
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN SIMON, K.C., M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.	The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. LORD CHATFIELD, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.	The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.
The Right Hon. L. HORE-BELISHA, M.P., Secretary of State for War.	The Right Hon. Sir KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt., M.P., Lord Privy Seal.	The Right Hon. LORD HANKEY, Minister without Portfolio.

**The following were also present :**

The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.	The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. E. L. BURGIN, M.P., Minister of Supply ( <i>Item 13</i> ).	Sir HORACE J. WILSON, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.
Air Chief Marshal Sir CYRIL L. N. NEWALL, Chief of the Air Staff.	Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
Major-General H. R. S. MASSY, Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff.	Major-General L. CARR, Assistant Chief of the Imperial General Staff ( <i>Item 13</i> ).

Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir HAROLD BROWN, Director-General, Munitions and Production, Ministry of Supply (*Item 13*).

**Secretariat.**

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.  
Major-General H. L. ISMAY.  
Captain A. D. NICHOLL, R.N.  
Mr. F. HEMMING.  
Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.  
Lieutenant-Colonel V. DYKES, R.E.  
Lieutenant-Colonel W. PORTER, R.E.

# WAR CABINET 100 (89).

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The Air  
Situation.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 1.)

1. *The Secretary of State for Air* said that one German aircraft had been intercepted on the previous day in Fife, but had been lost in cloud after a brief engagement.

Intensive search for the *Deutschland* continued.

Three reconnaissance aircraft had been despatched earlier in the morning to identify, and, if necessary, to bomb a force of mine-laying vessels, consisting of 6 mine-sweepers, 2 mine-layers, 2 small submarines and 4 patrol vessels, reported between Ameland and The Hague. A force of bombers was standing by to attack the ships if they proved to be German.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The Naval  
Situation.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 2.)

2. *The First Lord of the Admiralty* said that H.M.S. *Triad* had gone into Stavanger for repairs. It was anticipated that she would be ready for sea in five days' time.

The British ship *Sheafcrest* (2,700 tons) had been sunk by a mine in the Thames Estuary. This ship had been 600 yards off the course given to her. A Norwegian tanker (8,000 tons), which had been ordered in by the Contraband Control Service, had been struck by a mine off the Humber and was on fire.

Referring to the Prime Minister's enquiry at the previous Meeting as to the arrangements for defending shipping in the Downs, the *First Lord of the Admiralty* said that 4 Fighter Squadrons were in readiness to intervene if the shipping were attacked.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 2.)

In reply to a question, the *Chief of Naval Staff* said that it had not yet been possible to send a diver down to examine the position in the Clyde where a German submarine was reported to have sunk.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

Magnetic Mines.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 97th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 2.)

3. *The First Lord of the Admiralty* reported that the experiments in connection with magnetic mines had met with success. Two magnetic mines had been detonated by different methods, one in the Firth of Forth and one in the Thames Estuary. Very hopeful results had also been achieved by aircraft.

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that the French Ambassador had asked whether the Admiralty would issue a full statement about these mines, explaining the action taken by the Germans, the extent of the damage caused, and what we knew about these mines. The Foreign Secretary said that doubts, possibly inspired by Germany, had been expressed by certain neutrals, including the Japanese Ambassador, as to whether there was conclusive proof that the mines were German.

In discussion it was agreed that a Memorandum should be issued on this subject, although it would be necessary to consider very carefully how much should be said as to our knowledge of how the mines worked. There was plenty of evidence which we could produce that the mines had been sown by Germany.

The War Cabinet—

Asked the *First Lord of the Admiralty* to arrange for the preparation of a Memorandum on the subject of the German magnetic mine campaign.



**The Military Situation.**

(Previous Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 8.)

4. *The Secretary of State for War* said that the French 51st Division, which had been under the British Commander-in-Chief, had now been withdrawn and its place taken by our 5th Division.

An advance party of Canadians, consisting of 24 officers and 150 other ranks, was due to arrive at Aldershot later that day.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

**Dominion Air Training Scheme.**

(Previous Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 7.)

5. *The Secretary of State for Air* said that he had now prepared, in consultation with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, a draft reply to Mr. Mackenzie King's telegram No. 120 (attached as an Appendix to W.M. (39) 99th Conclusions).

The Secretary of State read the draft reply, which was approved subject to the omission of its concluding words, namely, "at the earliest possible moment." It was felt that these words, had they been retained, might have been used later on, in support of the contention that the despatch of one Division overseas constituted an adequate land effort on the part of Canada.

The War Cabinet:—

Invited the Prime Minister to send the telegram as approved to Mr. Mackenzie King. The text of this telegram is attached as an Appendix to the present conclusions.

**Finland.**

Invasion by  
Soviet Union.  
(Previous Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 8.)

6. *The Secretary of State for War* said that no important military operations appeared to have taken place in Finland. The Russians had crossed the frontier at several places, and there had been a number of sea and air bombardments.

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that he had received a report that M. Tanner had formed a new Government. The United States had appealed to both sides not to bomb open towns. In a conversation which he (the Foreign Secretary) had had with the Finnish Minister on the previous evening, he had gathered that there was a considerable state of confusion in Finland.

*The Prime Minister* thought that the resignation of the Finnish Government was significant and very likely presaged a surrender to the Russian demands.

**Attitude of United States.**

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* drew attention to Telegram No. 485, dated the 30th November, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Moscow, reporting that the United States Embassy had waited all night for instructions from Washington with regard to the Note, the text of which had been given to the Press in Washington the previous evening. Instructions from Washington had finally arrived at 8.30 that morning (the 30th November). When the United States Chargé d'Affaires finally handed the Note to the Commissar at the Foreign Office at 12.45 that afternoon, the latter had examined it, and had then made a cryptic remark that he was "surprised at the physical form." He had made no further comment, and had not given any promise of a reply. The United States Embassy had no further instructions.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

**Finland.**

Request for  
assistance in  
securing exports  
from Sweden.

7. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that the previous evening M. Gripenberg, the Finnish Minister in London, had asked for help to be given to Finland on various supply questions, e.g., the grant of permission for the re-export of petrol from Sweden to Finland, which, under an arrangement made with the Ministry of Economic Warfare, was not permissible without our consent. The Minister for Economic Warfare had agreed in principle to meet the Finnish request in regard to the above and certain similar matters, and arrangements had been made for a discussion to take place with the Finnish Minister that afternoon.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

**Germany.**

Attitude towards  
U.S.S.R.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 98th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 9.)

8. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* drew attention to Telegram No. 282, dated the 29th November, 1939, from His Majesty's Minister, Copenhagen, in which Mr. Howard-Smith reported that the Danish Naval Secretary claimed to have well informed knowledge that Admiral Raeder and the German Naval Staff were very strongly opposed to the idea of any further extension of Soviet influence westwards, including Finland, which might jeopardise the German position in the Baltic.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

**Germany.**

Possible  
intentions.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 98th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 10.)

9. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* drew attention to the following telegrams reporting information which might have some bearing on probable German intentions:—

Telegram No. 237, dated the 30th November, 1939, from His Majesty's Minister, The Hague, in which Sir Neville Bland reported that his French colleague had told him that he had a strong impression that something was brewing for the 4th December, in order to celebrate the imposition of the Allied decision to seize German exports. Aircraft were massing as near as possible to the German-Netherland frontier. The Air and Military Attachés had no confirmation of this rumour.

Telegram No. 199, dated the 29th November, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Brussels, in which Sir Robert Clive reported that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had told him that he considered the situation still very depressing. There were now 50 German Divisions on the Netherland and Belgian frontiers. In the last few days the Germans had been hinting that Belgium need not concern herself with German-Netherland relations. This was being said to create opposition in Belgium to the grant of assistance to the Netherlands.

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* then gave certain further information regarding possible German intentions, particulars of which are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

Balkans and the  
Middle East.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 99th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 5.)

Anglo-French  
strategical  
discussions.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 95th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 5.)

10. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that he had been informed the previous evening by M. Corbin, the French Ambassador, that General Gamelin was anxious himself to be present at the proposed Anglo-French discussions in regard to the Balkans and the Middle East, the preparations for which had been approved by the War Cabinet at their meeting noted in the margin. M. Corbin had added that, in consequence, the French Government desired that these discussions should take place in Paris. He (the Secretary of State) had replied that a meeting in Paris would be agreeable to us, as soon as the material now being prepared by our expert advisers was available. M. Corbin had inquired whether it would be possible for this meeting to take place on Monday, the 4th December.

*The Chief of the Air Staff* said that it had not been possible for the Chiefs of Staff Committee to conclude their consideration of this matter, owing to the absence in France of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff who was, however, returning that day. He would furnish the Foreign Office with material to enable the Secretary of State to give a definite reply to the communication received from the French Ambassador.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

United States of  
America.

German  
Propaganda.

11. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* drew attention to telegram No. 827 dated the 29th November, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Washington, in which Lord Lothian said that the reports of the continued sinking of British ships by mines was having a depressing effect on opinion in the United States, and that opinion was being still further depressed by reports that British and French aircraft production was still far inferior to that of Germany and was not gaining ground. Lord Lothian suggested that the best counter-propaganda would be for as full information as possible to be given to the United States correspondents in London. If there was no objection to publicity, he suggested that figures showing the arrival of British shipping in British ports, with particulars of the cargo carried, &c., should be given to the United States correspondents. Further, if the demands of military secrecy would permit, the aircraft production stories should be denied.

The War Cabinet :—

Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to consult with the Ministers concerned as to the suggestion made by Lord Lothian.

Italy.

Appreciation of  
internal situa-  
tion in Great  
Britain.

12. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* gave the War Cabinet certain information which threw light upon the way in which the Italian authorities viewed the internal situation in this country. Particulars of this information are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet took note of the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.



British  
Expeditionary  
Forces in France.  
Programme of  
expansion:  
equipment and  
maintenance  
position.  
(Previous  
References:  
W.M. (39) 53rd  
Conclusions,  
Minute 2, 54th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 4,  
and 63rd  
Conclusions,  
Minute 6.)

13. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (Paper W.P. (39) 141) on the State of Equipment and Maintenance Position of the First Ten Divisions. A record of the discussion on this subject is contained in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet :—

- (i) Approved the proposal in the Secretary of State for War's Memorandum that the immediate aim should be the increase of the British Army in France to a strength of 10 Divisions by the end of February, 1940.
- (ii) Agreed that the position in regard to the state of equipment and maintenance of the British Army in France should be examined in detail by the Military Co-ordination Committee, in collaboration with the Minister of Supply.
- (iii) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to examine and report on the possibility of increasing the number of heavy and light anti-aircraft guns to be supplied to the British Army in France at the expense of the Air Defence of Great Britain.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,  
December 1, 1939.*

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## APPENDIX.

## DOMINION AIR TRAINING SCHEME.

(Minute 5.)

*Telegram to the Government of Canada.*

(Most Immediate.)

YOUR telegram No. 120 of 28th November.

The following from Prime Minister for Prime Minister :—

*Begins:* 1. I am very grateful to you for the full statement of your views, which greatly clarifies the position.

2. I am satisfied that no question of principle divides us. Our common approach to the problem, expressed most clearly in your personal and secret telegram of 3rd November, proceeds on the basis that there is no thought on the part of our Governments or our peoples of stinting or sparing our efforts or resources, and that we are determined to throw ourselves into the war to our utmost capacity.

3. There are obviously limits to the efforts of which Canada is capable, as, indeed, there are to the resources of all parts of the British Commonwealth, and our common concern is to put these resources to the best use in the prosecution of the war till victory is achieved.

4. I now understand that you consider it essential to publish the opinion of the United Kingdom Government that the Air Training Scheme should have priority in Canada's war effort. This is, in fact, our view, and we have no objection to its being made public provided that it is made clear at the same time that we also attach very great importance, both from a military and a psychological point of view, to the presence of Canadian land forces in the theatre of war at the earliest possible moment.

5. We would therefore suggest that announcement should be in following terms :—

"The United Kingdom Government have informed us that, considering present and future requirements, they feel that participation in the Air Training Scheme would provide more effective assistance towards our ultimate victory than any other form of co-operation which Canada can give. At the same time, they would wish it to be clearly understood that they would welcome no less heartily the presence of Canadian land forces in the theatre of war."

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